

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

COMMITTEES:  
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COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND  
TRANSPORTATION  
ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC  
WORKS  
RULES AND ADMINISTRATION

April 11, 2018

Mr. Mark Zuckerberg  
CEO, Facebook  
1 Hacker Way  
Menlo Park, CA 94025

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg,

To make important decisions about their privacy, Facebook users need a clear understanding of the breadth of personal data that Facebook collects, stores, and utilizes for advertising purposes. I was troubled by your refusal to answer my questions on this issue when you testified before the Senate Commerce Committee on April 10, 2018. Your repeated attempts to undermine my usage of the term “categories” as a descriptor were particularly baffling, given that this verbiage has been used by others in discussing these matters. Further, the scope of personal data collection was at the core of the debate in recent years in the European Union on data privacy.

An academic study<sup>1</sup> published at the Charles II University of Madrid in February 2018 examined the frequency with which Facebook collected, stored, and processed sensitive categories of personal data for advertising purposes. These categories included, for example, a person’s health, political orientation, or religious beliefs. As you know, the upcoming European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) will significantly restrict the use of such sensitive categories of personal data.

A Washington Post article published in August 2016<sup>2</sup> discussed at least ninety-eight personal data points that Facebook uses to target ads to users. In the intervening years, public concern has only increased as the attributes advertisers are interested in using has exploded. I had hoped my questions would give you an opportunity to further clarify this critical issue. Americans are asking for a public dialogue about the *purposes* for which Facebook uses their personal data; but a meaningful conversation cannot happen until users also understand the *sources* from which their data is gleaned and the *specific data* — *which characteristics, attributes, labels, or categories of data points* — are being collected and utilized.

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<sup>1</sup> González Cabañas, J., Cuevas, A., and Cuevas, R. Facebook Use of Sensitive Data for Advertising in Europe, 2018. <https://arxiv.org/pdf/1802.05030.pdf>

<sup>2</sup>Dewey, Caitlin. “98 personal data points that Facebook uses to target ads to you.” *Washington Post*, 19 Aug 2016, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2016/08/19/98-personal-data-points-that-facebook-uses-to-target-ads-to-you/?hpid=hp\\_hp-top-table-main-facebook-data:homepage&utm\\_term=.87fea7f4908f](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2016/08/19/98-personal-data-points-that-facebook-uses-to-target-ads-to-you/?hpid=hp_hp-top-table-main-facebook-data:homepage&utm_term=.87fea7f4908f).

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To address these concerns, please provide answers to the following questions:

- How many categories (i.e. attributes, factors, labels, or data points) does Facebook collect about particular users?
- How many categories, as the term is described above, are used to construct the digital profiles that Facebook utilizes to direct ads to particular users?
- If a user opts out of directed advertising, does Facebook halt collection of all such data?
- If a user opts out of directed advertising, does Facebook delete all such data that was previously stored? Alternatively, does Facebook instead simply stop utilization of that data for directed advertising purposes?
- When users download their Facebook data, as Facebook has recently enabled, is all ad targeting data included in that file?

I appreciate the opportunity to continue this conversation and look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,



Deb Fischer  
United States Senator